

Detroit Arsenal
Dearborn, Michigan

Wayne Co

HAB No. ⁴¹⁻27-7
HAB
MICH
82. DERB
1-

~~PHOTOGRAPHS~~
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 27

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Branson V. Gamber, District Officer
3500 Union Guardian Building, Detroit, Michigan

HABS
MICH
82. Dearb

DETROIT ARSENAL
Michigan Avenue and Monroe Boulevard
Dearborn, Wayne County, Michigan

Owner: Dearborn.

Date of Erection: 1833.

Architect and Builder: U.S. Government.

Present Condition: Fair.

Number of Stories: Varies according to building.

Materials of Construction: Brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

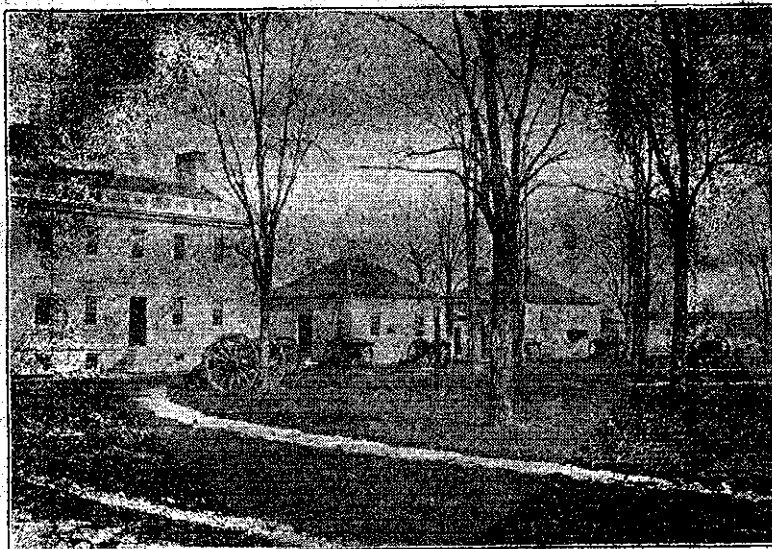
The Dearborn Independent

THE FORDSON INDEPENDENT, THE FORDSON SUN, THE
DEARBORN NEWS, THE DEARBORNITE, CONSOLIDATED

Published Every FRIDAY By The Dearborn Independent
At 14552 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, Michigan.

DEARBORN, MICHIGAN, FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 1934

SCENE IN DEARBORN IN CIVIL WAR DAYS



The above photograph was taken over sixty years ago. It shows an interior view of the United States Arsenal then in full operation in Dearborn. Reproduction of this photograph is made through the courtesy of Lytel and Elizabeth Ross, pioneer residents of this community.

United States Arsenal Was Founded Here 101 Years Ago Next Month

Fort Brought First Boom To
Dearborn In 1833, History
of City Reveals.

In the rush and excitement of 1933 Dearborn overlooked, last year, the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the United States Government Arsenal which brought the first boom of prosperity to this, then infant, community. The history of Dearborn now being compiled by The Dearborn Independent tells the authentic story of this famous arsenal and puts to flight many unfounded rumors concerning this historic spot.

Some of the material, as told in the history, that will be published in book form, is made public below:

War Department records at Washington show that the Federal Government selected the site for the Arsenal at Dearbornville approximately ten miles from Detroit in the northwest territory in 1832. Construction was started on the buildings in the Spring of 1833, under the direction of Colonel Joshua Howard. Some of the buildings were completed that year but the entire arsenal was not completed until 1837. It was permanently occupied with a force of two officers and fifty artisans and soldiers the following year.

The arsenal was occupied continuously from 1838 until 1875, at which time it was abandoned as a War Department project and was transferred from the custody

United States Arsenal Was Founded Here 101 Years Ago

MICH
82-DEAR
1-

of the War Department to the Department of the Interior. The sale of this property into private hands was undertaken by the Department of the Interior a few years later and disposed of piecemeal by various methods, including that of auctioning by the Federal Government.

The United States Detroit Arsenal, as the place was known, was intended and used not as a fort, which would be a point of defense in event of a war, but rather a supply depot in which war materials could be manufactured, stored, and issued to the military forces of the northwest territory and the States of Michigan and Wisconsin.

The arsenal grounds stretched along the north side of Michigan avenue, then simply a winding trail, from the River Rouge west to a point somewhere beyond what is now Military Avenue. The arsenal proper consisted of a square three hundred and sixty feet to a side, completely surrounded with brick buildings along the sides. A brick wall 12 feet high and 2½ feet thick connected all of the buildings of the rectangle. The grounds had two points of entrance through the wall. These were two sets of iron gates located in the centers of the walls on the north and south sides of the arsenal at opposite ends of what was known as the center drive, later called Monroe Boulevard, running through the middle of the arsenal grounds. The old iron gates that hung in the south wall facing Michigan avenue are still in existence, stored in the barn of Mr. Lytel Ross, who purchased them at an auction sale when the Fort was being dismantled.

The group of buildings, which made up the arsenal, included eleven structures. Among the first buildings to be constructed in the group were the soldiers' and officers' quarters. This latter building which still stands, is city property and now serves as the West End police station. For many years preceding the consolidation this building served the city and the village of Dearborn as a City Hall. Other buildings of the original group that are still standing include the building now known as Scandia Hall on Monroe Boulevard. This building

served in the arsenal as the gun carriage shed and paint shop. It was one story high. This structure, after the property was sold by the government, served many purposes. It was at one time a saloon; it served as a Masonic Hall, during which time the roof was raised high enough to permit the inclusion of a second floor in the structure. It now houses a flower store, besides the Scandia Lodge headquarters.

Two, now abandoned, buildings that still stand along the alley in back of the post office on the west side of Monroe originally served in the arsenal as the carpenter's shop and the smith's shop. These buildings have been occupied by various business establishments at different times since they came into the possession of Mrs. Humbert, who purchased them from the Federal government about 1885.

One other building of the original group within the arsenal walls still stands. This building, which is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. August Klippe, located on the northeast corner of Monroe and Garrison avenues, was the sutler's shop in the old arsenal. It is in an excellent state of preservation. This building was originally sold by the government to Mrs. Ottilege Prowell in 1892. The transfer was recorded by a patent signed by M. McKean, as secretary to President Benjamin Harrison. The property was described in the patent as lot No. 73 of the Detroit Arsenal Grounds. Mr. Klippe came into possession of the property in 1910 when he purchased it from Mrs. Prowell. The walls of this house are of the solid brick construction that marked the type of building used throughout the entire arsenal. The attic of this structure is made of a frame work of heavy black walnut timbers fastened together with wooden pegs in a dove-tail construction.

The magazine building, of the fort, which was located some distance to the east of the arsenal grounds on a knoll, still stands. This building has been considerably remodeled and now serves as the home of Mr. Lytel Ross and his sister, Elizabeth. The Ross family have been in possession of this section of the original Arsenal Grounds for many years, so-

from the government drive between these buildings about 1882. The original magazine building was a one-story rick structure with walls nearly three feet thick. It had no windows and only two very heavy doors at either end. This building served as the storage space for powder and shells. It had no basement, but had a floor and wall siding inside constructed of heavy white pine. Rumors that have been current for many years to the effect that there was an underground tunnel connecting the arsenal with the magazine are not based on facts. The fact that in the basement of the arsenal building an archway was constructed in the east wall which looked as if it might have been the entrance to such an underground tunnel and the fact that children had gained access to an underground tunnel which had served as a sewer, running from the arsenal to an open ditch, leading into the river, gave rise to these rumors. This version of the story is substantiated by the fact that the city in building sewers has never unearthed anything in the neighborhood of where this underground passage is supposed to have been.

When the magazine building came into the hands of the Ross family there still remained in it several shells. One of these shells a few years previous had exploded in the magazine and had caused considerable fear among the natives concerning this building. When the supply of shells was discovered by Mr. Nathaniel Ross, father of Lytel Ross, he immediately communicated with government officials, asking them how to dispose of these egg-shaped plaster of paris, copper-bound missiles of destruction, and was advised to move them gently and dispose of them in the river. This was done. Three wagon loads of these shells were transported on a straw-cushioned wagon bottom and thrown into the River Rouge. A few years ago some boys swimming in the River Rouge, near this point, brought out of the water what they thought was a huge egg-shaped stone. Surprised at the copper band around it, they inquired of Mr. Ross if it could possibly be one of the original bullets. He examined it, said that it was, and the boys promptly threw it back into the river.

A row of huge maple trees extended between the arsenal grounds and the magazine building along what probably was a

Some of these trees still stand. The largest building of the arsenal group was located on the east side of the rectangle. Its architectural design was similar to that of the Kennedee Arsenal and had a balustrade similar to the one in the Florida Arsenal, previously constructed by the War Department. This building served for many years as a robe factory, known as the Arna Mills where imitation buffalo robes were manufactured by a company owned very largely by Herman Kalmbach and the Clippert family. This structure was destroyed by fire in 1910. Many houses built in the neighborhood of Monroe and Garrison avenues were constructed with brick reclaimed from time to time as the arsenal buildings and walls were dismantled.

The southwest corner building of the original arsenal served for many years as the Township Hall, prior to its razing to make way for the construction of new business buildings on Michigan avenue in 1929. The buildings which served as the soldiers' barracks and the officers' quarters, located on the north side of the rectangle, were dismantled to make way for school buildings at Monroe and Garrison avenues.

A huge cistern was located in the immediate center of the arsenal square which served as a water supply station for the arsenal and gave ample protection against fire within the grounds. Connecting drains and sewers from this cistern are probably also responsible for the rumors concerning the underground tunnels that have been current for several years. The huge cistern that provided the water supply for the arsenal was located directly under what is now Monroe Boulevard. It was filled several years ago when the pavement on this street was laid. The tunnel through which boys had "crawled half way to the river," it is entirely reasonable to presume, was the brick sewer through which the overflow from the cistern and sewage was carried from the arsenal grounds in a northeasterly direction to an open ditch in the neighborhood of Morley avenue that led directly to the River Rouge. This ditch and sewer was covered over when building construction in this neighborhood began to develop several years ago.

The original magazine building was partially from a wall which was located between the magazine of the grounds and the soldiers' barracks.